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**Ingrid D. Rowland, *From Pompeii: The Afterlife of a Roman Town*.  
Cambridge, MA; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press,  
2014. Pp. 340. ISBN 9780674047938. \$28.95.**

**Reviewed by Eric Moormann, Radboud Universiteit (e.moormann@let.ru.nl)**

This is an extremely well written book that keeps the reader (at least this reader) reading and re-reading from the first sentence onwards; it cannot easily be put aside. Rowland's scholarly interest in Pompeii apparently stems from her very diverse research on artists, art theory, and Italy. Trained as an art historian, but with a deep knowledge of Latin and Roman culture, the author succeeds in transmitting the fascination the extinct towns exerted on authors, artists, and travelers, including herself.

Rowland discusses evocations of Pompeii by travelers, writers, scholars, and film-makers. Each chapter starts with a 'protagonist', but she does not necessarily follow this person throughout the chapter. That makes the book much more vivid than a systematic discussion, but also less easy to briefly consult except by using the (good) index.

After telling of her first visit to Naples as a girl in 1962, Rowland evokes a return in 2013 with a long quotation from Leopardi's famous poem on flowering broom, about "Vesuvius the Exterminator" (*sterminator Vesevo*), since she sees broom among other flowers and plants embellishing and devastating the archaeological data. After a brief description of the 79 eruption, the reader gets some fragments of a poem by Giordano Bruno on Vesuvius. The account of the powerful 1631 eruption alternates with the story of the local saint Januarius (San Gennaro) and his cult. In chapter 3 vulcanological research by Lucas Holste (or Holstenius) and Athanasius Kircher brings us to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Rowland quotes both scholars extensively in her own translations from Latin and makes them approachable for the modern readers. <sup>1</sup> A couple of archival documents show the difficulty Kircher met when he wanted to publish a scholarly book on phenomena seen during the eruption of 1660. She makes clear that Kircher's work on volcanoes was an important step forward in the eyes of modern vulcanologists, and places it in its Roman context. The last section of the chapter is on the earliest finds of Herculaneum around 1710, which Rowland elegantly connects with Holste's first mentioning debris from the ancient sites. In this way she closes the chapter and creates a perfect circle of seventeenth-century scholarship.

Chapter 4 is on eighteenth-century travelers to Herculaneum. Many quotations are from the widely read *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, and are by visitors like a certain Mr. Freeman and the painter George Knapton. These foreigners bring Rowland to a brief evocation of villa culture from antiquity up to the Kingdom of Naples. The reactions of eighteenth-century European visitors on seeing the mural paintings invite her to discuss a familiar topic, Renaissance evocations of antique frescoes in the circles around Raphael. And this is only the first half of the chapter! There follow sections on Venus, Priapus, depictions of sexual encounters, brothels, and sixteenth-century descriptions of various sexual positions, before returning to old Herculaneum and eighteenth-century Naples.

The reader may understand from the brief summaries of these longish chapters that Rowland's book is no linear and chronological account of the discovery of Herculaneum and Pompeii and its impact on western culture. She works highly associatively but never loses track of the subject she lays out at the beginning of each chapter. But let us follow her work somewhat further.

A very brief chapter on the earliest excavations in Pompeii is the prelude to the narrative of Mozart's visit to Naples and Herculaneum. We read about music in Naples and Mozart's visit in 1770 to the English ambassador, Sir William Hamilton, where he met William Thomas Beckford. Through Beckford's eyes we see one of the highlights in those days, the Temple of Isis in Pompeii, which he might have visited together with the young composer. I think that Rowland is right in being skeptical about an old suggestion that Wolfgang used his memory as the basis of one of his last works, *Die Zauberflöte*, especially because of the long gap in time and the involvement of Emanuel Schikaneder as the librettist and producer of the opera.<sup>2</sup> A year later, the excavators discovered a group of eighteen victims in the Villa of Diomedes. Rowland describes various reactions (poems, stories, travelogues) about the impression of a female breast, and continues her historical tour up to the 1830s. Pride of place is given to Karl Bryullov's huge canvas "The Last Day of Pompeii" which inspired various authors including Bulwer-Lytton. Rowland detects various artistic sources in her thoughtful analysis. Chapter 8 ends with Robert Harris's 2003 novel *Pompeii*, the most successful novel since Bulwer-Lytton.

In chapters 9 and 10 we follow the development of mass tourism in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rowland pays especial attention to the excellent and deservedly famous travel books of Dickens and Twain.

With the portraits of Giuseppe Fiorelli (the brief chapter 11) and Bartolo Longo (the very long chapter 12) Rowland addresses the modernization of Pompeii and Italy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fiorelli organized the excavations in many new ways, managed mass tourism, and became the 'inventor' of the plaster casts of cavities, which continue to captivate visitors to the site. Longo created the new town of Pompei, for many devout Italians more famous than the adjacent excavations because of the Shrine of the Virgin of the Rosary. This is a fine piece of history writing, missing in almost all books devoted to old Pompeii and its fortune. In my opinion, chapter 13 on the commerce in cameos around Pompeii has little to do with the book's main subject. Chapter 14 introduces Renoir as one of many artists inspired by what they saw in Pompeii. Apart from still lives in Pompeian wall painting, nudes in these pictures would have incited him according to Rowland, but I rather tend to seeing the Raphaelesque nudes as major sources of inspiration, as does Rowland (pp. 221-224). In chapter 15, on ancient wall painting, Vitruvius and the late nineteenth-century scholar August Mau merge into a fine sketch of the study of Roman frescoes.<sup>3</sup> Another visitor rarely recorded in other books is the future Japanese Emperor Hirohito in 1921. Hirohito's visit may have led to post-World War II Japanese interest in Pompeii, recalled briefly in the same chapter. A brief chapter is dedicated to the most important excavator of twentieth-century Campania, Amedeo Maiuri, and the American bombardment of the excavations in 1943. Unfortunately, Rowland does not work out the sketchy portrait of this fascinating, but also puzzling person who was capable of acquiring enormous funding for his many projects both under the Fascists and in post-war Italy. Apparently she is more in sympathy with Rossellini's 1954 *Viaggio in Italia*, a nowadays highly esteemed movie in which Pompeii (and Maiuri in person) play a brief, but important role in making the protagonists aware of their fate. Probably because of the psychological connotations of this film, Rowland inserts a brief analysis of Wilhelm Jensen's

*Gradiva*, better known from Freud's analysis than as a novella of its own. The last chapters, no 19 and the "Coda", tie together some loose threads about modern tourism and management of the site. Rowland succeeds in reuniting the characters of the previous chapters and fantasizes about their reactions to the modern situation.

The book is a splendid potpourri of responses to old Pompeii. Rowland elegantly discusses many figures with reference to her own scholarship, especially Kircher, Vitruvius, and the art of Rome in the Renaissance. A reader who would like a chronological account of excavations and research at Pompeii should turn elsewhere, but every reader will find satisfaction in having come into contact with the peculiar Pompeii personalities depicted here.<sup>4</sup> The illustrations are well chosen, but are not of high quality.

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### Notes:

<sup>1.</sup> Though some original texts can be found in the notes, most are not included. This is true for other chapters as well. There are even examples of original archive materials quoted in translation.

<sup>2.</sup> Rowland also discusses Mozart's free masonry and free masonry in Naples. See on Mozart's Magic Flute and all these matters also Jan Assmann, *Die Zauberflöte Oper und Mysterium*, Munich 2005.

<sup>3.</sup> Rowland translated Vitruvius into English and knows his work very well. However, he cannot have described the Fourth Style (p. 235), which started in the era of Emperor Claudius, long after the 20s B.C., when Vitruvius – here portrayed as a catapult maker from Campania (p. 228), for which assumption there is no proof at all – wrote his text.

<sup>4.</sup> There are some factual mistakes. I note them not as a new Beckmesser, but in the hope that a new edition may remediate them. Antonio Piaggio, the unroller of the Herculaneum papyri, came from Rome, where he was a Latin librarian in the Vatican library, not from Naples (p. 117). Beethoven cannot have written the music to a Rienzi after Bulwer-Lytton's 1835 novel (p. 137), since he died in 1827. The Sallustius of the 'House of Sallustius' portrayed by Bulwer cannot be the historian Gaius Sallustius Crispus (p. 142), who lived between 86 and 35 B.C. and had nothing to do with Pompeii. Fig. 14.2 (p. 215) is no "still life from Pompeii" but the lower section of a large mythological representation from the "Basilica" in Herculaneum, showing how Heracles finds his son Telephus in the mountains, fed by a deer. A small Medusa head from the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum has the strange caption "Diagonal painting on an ancient Roman wall painting from Pompeii" (p. 218). The narrative sometimes runs too fast: Rowland's jumping from Maiuri's work in the Villa of the Mysteries to a description of paintings in the House of the Menander, which, not being introduced explicitly, seem to belong to the Villa's decorations (p. 250). Small errors are very few. On p. 58: 1732, should be 1739/1740 (one of the first visits to the tunnels of Herculaneum); p. 128: 1538 should be 1828, the year of Bryullov's first visit to Pompeii (see p. 129).